

Date: June 2, 2009
To: Representative Angerer
From: Richard Solomon MD

Re: Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to present to this committee.

My name is Richard Solomon. I am a developmental and behavioral pediatrician with 20 years experience in caring for children with autism. Over this time, I have learned that most young children with autism have extraordinary potential and will respond, often dramatically, to intensive, highly structured, early intervention. From my office practice I know this to be true and there is now a growing body of sound scientific research that also supports this. Why is this intensive, early intervention so effective? The answer is 'neuronal plasticity'. Let me explain.

Autism is a genetic-neurologic condition, biological in origin, that affects the brain's ability to process complex information and makes it hard for children with autism to develop language and social skills. Instead the children prefer sameness and end up doing repetitive behaviors or having dominating interests. These children tend to self-isolate and will do quite poorly if left alone without engaging interventions. The saving grace, neurologically speaking, is something called 'neuronal plasticity'. Hidden in the brain of the child with autism—and this condition is different from all other developmental conditions—is an exceptional ability to make new neuronal connections. In other words, intensive intervention literally changes the brain from the outside in.

For 10 years in the 1990's I worked in Pennsylvania where the state provided 40 hours of intensive, 1 on 1, early intervention paid for by Medicaid health insurance. The children who got this intervention went from not talking to talking, from not being social to being social. I was astounded by the progress most of the children made. When I came to Michigan there was nothing comparable offered by the public sector. Neither schools, mental health agencies nor health insurance plans offered these critical treatments.

When Ohio Representative Peterson's grandson was diagnosed with autism, he immediately sponsored legislation that paid for intensive intervention. When Bob Wright, the president of NBC became the grandfather of a child with autism, he created the most powerful advocacy organization in America—Autism Speaks. Is that what it takes to do what's right for children with autism and their families—become personally affected? There are 14,000 children in Michigan who are personally affected. I can tell you without any doubt that if *your* child had autism you would want the type of intervention described in this bill.

Autism is a medical genetic-neurologic condition that is as acute as a brain tumor. And like brain surgery, intensive intervention is life saving. Treatment for this condition should be paid for at least in part by health care. I urge you to support this bill. Thank you.